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ABSTRACT

This publication is a compilation of information on "literacy theater," a process that involves the act of presenting a short, worst-case scenario that is followed by the actors staying in character for a dialogue with audience members. The guide defines literacy theater as being constructed to involve the interaction of two to five people, a facilitator, and the audience; it demands cooperation and teamwork. Following an introduction, chapter I offers a history of the full literacy theater process. Chapter II addresses the rationale. Chapter III offers thoughts on facilitation: asking questions to model interaction, listening, directing the audience to unexplored solutions, repeating audience's questions and comments, and complimenting the audience. Chapter IV focuses on the actors--who they are, what the actor needs to know about his/her character, costumes, training, basic acting techniques, and staying in character. Chapter V discusses how to create a good scenario. Chapter VI explains some techniques for performing. Chapter VII provides some training exercises with their purposes. Chapters VIII and IX focus on theater with two special groups---teenagers and in corrections. Chapters X and XI discuss evaluation and funding. Sample scenarios are presented throughout the manual. Appendixes include names and addresses of people who have been involved in literacy theater and 16 references. (YLB)

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LITERACY THEATRE

Dorothy Oliver

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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For Marti Stevens

whose
enthusiasm for life's
best:
its natural beauties
its dramas
its foods
its peoples,
knew no bounds
and
enriched us all.

Martha Stevens

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January 1997, Concord, New Hampshire

INTRODUCTION

The act of presenting a short, worst case scenario, which is followed by the actors staying in character to dialogue with audience members, has been called exploratory, experiential, improvisation, social action, or literacy theater. In this text, I use the term literacy theater to describe the process.

Constructed to involve the interaction of two to five people, a facilitator and the audience, literacy theater demands cooperation and teamwork. The work itself involves a mosaic of people's thoughts and actions evolving around an issue or issues. Over the years many people have discussed its power and its process. I have taken the liberty here to report on some of these participants' thoughts and experiences in an attempt to consider literacy theater's various dimensions.

Kathleen J. Mackin, Ph.D. suggested a "how-to manual" in her literacy theater evaluation for the National Institute for Literacy Grant in 1993. Marti Stevens who began the theater had talked with many people about writing a book on the process. She had actually rented a motel room with a colleague, Cynthia Tanous, and insisted Cynthia keep her captive for a weekend while she wrote. Sadly for all, Marti died in May of 1993. As we wait for Congress to alter the funding frameworks for adult education, it seemed to be a good time to attempt some explanation and codification of literacy theater describing how we adult educators have experienced it across the United States and Canada since 1985.

I have divided this manual into chapters so people may read the section that interests them and ignore the others. Because some people will choose to skip around I have repeated from chapter to chapter items that I feel are essential to the process.

INTRODUCTION

I hope that readers will find this work a useful compilation of information, and that people will let me know what could be added that would help readers to understand, initiate and/or carry out the process of educating others through literacy theater. You may contact me by writing to Dorothy Oliver, New Hampshire Department of Education, 101 Pleasant Street, Concord NH 03301, (603-271-6698). There are two questions I am still very interested in: Why is it so effective? And why is it so much fun?

While participating in literacy theater, I have learned from hundreds of people, co-participants, audiences, and trainees. It would be impossible to mention everyone here. There are, however, two people I would like to single out.

Judy Green, whom many of us in adult education know from her good low level reading series, and as an actor with the Northern New England Social Action Theater, helped edit the manual. Her assistance has been invaluable. Thank you, Judy!

Above all, we are all very indebted to Marti Stevens, who had the creativity, energy and foresight to understand that a communication medium used successfully with teenagers to produce learning and change could be equally effective when used with adults. So on behalf of all of us who have benefited, "Thank you, Marti!"

HISTORY

For years, theater has been used as a tool for consciousness raising, problem solving and social change. For example, Guerrilla Theater, Paulo Friere's Popular Theater, and the Theatre of the Oppressed demonstrated that theater was one of the most effective communication tools to influence social change. Many adult educators were aware of these varying types of social action theater but few had used them for educational purposes.

One of the first groups to develop and use the full literacy theater process was the Family Life Division of New York Medical College in 1973, where teenagers from local high schools gathered together to present scenes from their real world. The teens were all nonprofessional actors who would explore issues presented by the audience—drugs, alcohol, health and developmental issues—and then stay in character while they dialogued with the audience. Because of the success of this program, similar peer education projects developed around the country, giving teenagers a forum to discuss and problem-solve issues affecting their lives.

The new and surprising component of Family Life Division's teen theater was the segment where the actors stayed in character while the audience questioned and dialogued with them. This had not been a part of other theater presentations that attempted to use the process.

Marti Stevens, a director of Somerset County Basic Skills Program in Skowhegan, Maine, first used theater with teens by adopting the Family Life Division model. Its effectiveness persuaded her to try it with adult educators at a Northern New England Conference in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, in June of 1984. After that very memorable experience, members of the Northern New England Social

Action group began to collaborate to learn to utilize the process to address their concerns with other adult educators and their communities. The 1985 Commission on Adult Basic Education Conference in Montreal, was the first conference at which these seasoned adult educators from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont presented, and it was at this presentation that it became very clear that literacy theater was a dynamic and effective staff training model.

Seven LSCA Library Literacy grants (FY1987-92, FY1995) and a grant from the National Literacy Institute in 1993, enabled the Northern New England Social Action Theater to perform in forty-six states. From more extensive training sessions provided in twenty-eight states, eighteen theater groups formed to perform and interact with audiences in their states to address specific concerns within their communities.

A SCENARIO FOR STUDENTS

WHY DON'T THEY JUST GO BACK TO THEIR OWN COUNTRY?

Two male characters, Jerry and Steve, talking about Julio, a new student at their school who has just moved to the United States from El Salvador. Jerry thinks Julio is pretty cool and has been hanging out with him after school, trying to learn a little Spanish and kicking a soccer ball around with him. Julio is in the ESL program at school, except for math classes. Steve refers to Julio as the 'bean-eater' and thinks that Julio is a jerk simply because he's Hispanic. Steve refers to how 'they' are taking over the country and stealing jobs from Americans. Jerry tries to tell Steve about how Julio's family escaped repression in El Salvador, but Steve won't hear any of it. He delivers the tag line: "Why don't they just go back to their own country?"

Copied from CLEARWAY Improv Scenarios

RATIONALE

A basic dilemma in the field of adult literacy is the need to train and retrain professional and volunteer teachers of literacy. Adult education teachers' jobs are usually part-time and do not provide benefits. Because of this teachers do not generally make a long term commitment to adult education programs. Thus, turnover of teachers and administrators is usually high, necessitating frequent training and retraining (Pelavin, 1991).

Literacy theater has shown itself to be a dynamic training technique for adult education teachers, administrators and volunteers. It explores the androgogical content of adult education—understanding adult learners and cultural differences, and being aware of a variety of teaching methods, including providing for a positive learning environment, offering opportunities for success, providing awareness of student progress and maintaining appropriate student-teacher interactions.

Literacy theater provides an alternative model that encourages the learning process through nonlinear, holistic and intuitive strategies. The approach is one that stimulates the nonverbal and emotional side of the brain--the right hemisphere (Lewis, 1986). Most adult educators have training in college systems requiring a predominance of left-brain skills; the adults they work with in literacy programs are often most comfortable using their right brain. Linda Lewis in "Theater: A Catalyst for Dialogue and Action" writes:

> Theatrical techniques may be underutilized not because they are ineffective but because continuing and human resource educators have still to understand how to incorporate and utilize the strategies in their own environments. (Lewis, 1986)

RATIONALE

In 1986, the National ABE Staff Development Consortium developed a set of principles and techniques for effective ABE staff development based on research from both adult education and K-12 sources. Literacy theater training addresses five of those concerns:

> 1. The experience base of adults is taken into account... activities are planned which relate to each individual's conceptual framework and accommodate and build on the past experiences of all participants.
>
> 2. When a participant chooses to become involved in an activity there is a far greater likelihood that the experience will be meaningful.
>
> 3. The implementation of meaningful and quality professional development activities involve considering the situation, skill and experience of current staff.
>
> 4. Staff development activities are closely related to state or local priorities.
>
> 5. Staff development focuses on goals that are both meaningful and attainable, given the constraints that are present in the teaching/learning environment (Parker, 1986).

Literacy theater training is wonderful for the kinesthetic learners. During training workshops their enthusiasm for the process is infectious. The scenario process addresses the learning styles of both the listener and the speaker. It takes into account the intelligence of the linguist, the logical, the kinesthetic, and the interpersonal as defined by Gardner. It is learning without lectures, blackboards, experts, flip charts, pencils, or workbooks. In New Hampshire, literacy theater is part of the staff training for new staff each year. It models good adult education principles when the audience begins interacting to solve the conflicts presented. Every year, evaluations confirm that it is a very valuable exercise for the new teachers and teacher aides. Jan Warren, coordinator of the SABES Massachusetts Southeast

Improvisational Drama Group, says that all the evaluations of their staff training through literacy theater have also been excellent and that it has been a tremendously effective tool for training.

I quote once again from Linda Lewis, Associate Professor of Human Resources Education at the University of Connecticut:

> The protocols of exploratory theater can be transferred for use in any work or learning environment. Exploratory theater is a way of presenting issues so that people want to talk about them. The technique is inexpensive and manageable as anyone can learn to improvise a dialogue or play a role. Because theater is entertaining, it can attract and hold the interest of a large number of individuals and, thus, is time-and-cost effective.
>
> The exploratory process works well precisely because the actors are familiar with the issues and situations they are presenting. By simply creating a fresh way to talk about existing problems, individuals have an opportunity to develop leadership skills, build self-confidence, and vent feelings. New learning occurs as performers and audience become teachers and learners at the same time. (Lewis, 1986)

The paradigm of literacy theater permits ultimate flexibility. Its structure offers the framework onto which staff issues may be overlaid. The participants identify their needs and concerns, base scenarios on them and dialogue with the characters and audience defining options, roles and responsibilities.

A SCENARIO

I'M DOING ALL I CAN

FOUR ACTORS: Factory worker, wife, neighbor, neighbor's husband

SCENE: Kitchen. Wives discuss closing of plant, job opportunities. Factory worker comes home; neighbor leaves; worker and wife discuss recruitment at plant that day.

WIFE: Faye
Married to factory worker Mike
Can read well; has done Mike's reading for him; has confidence in Mike's abilities; sure he will find a new job when recruiters talk to him
Baby-sits at home to earn money for the family.

NEIGHBOR: Gloria
Married to Freddy who works with Mike
Freddy has found new job; answered ad he saw on bulletin board at work; Will be making more money
Sympathetic, encouraging; does not know Mike can't read.

FACTORY WORKER: Mike
Worked in factory 16 years before plant closing; illiterate; dropped out of eighth grade after being held back; expresses himself well verbally; married to Faye; two kids; one preschooler; "Men in three- piece suits" came to recruit at work; couldn't bring forms home; too embarrassed to ask for help filling out the forms.

NEIGHBOR'S HUSBAND: Freddy
Long time friend and co-worker of Mike
Plant closing has become a real opportunity for him.

CLOSING REMARK: Faye recounts results of baby-sitting etc., says: "It's up to you. I'm doing all I can."

PROPS: 2 coffee cups, Mike's work hat

UNDER QUESTIONING: Friends had no idea Mike couldn't read. Faye very supportive of Mike. "He can do so many things well; reading is what I can do. We're a good team." Mike says he doesn't want to go to school and he doesn't want others to know that he can't read.

Copied from *Maine Literacy Awareness Theater Scenarios*

FACILITATION

In literacy theater, the facilitator is the person who combines the raw ingredients to turn them into the learning process that they become. In summary, he brings the audience together by modeling how the two distinct components, audience and actors, should interact. He introduces the theater and each individual scenario; he ends every scenario and wraps up the whole session. From 1985 to 1993, Marti Stevens had been Northern New England's sole facilitator. After her death in May, 1993, a group of theater participants met at the Maine Summer Institute in Sunday River, Maine, to review the principles that Marti had used to make the theater facilitation process effective. Some of the thoughts are collected here.

Marti always welcomed the audience. Then she explained what was going to happen: that the audience was going to see scenes which depicted worst case scenarios, that she would stop the scene at its crisis point, that the actors would stay in character and that the audience members would become an important part of the process by asking the characters relevant questions, making comments, providing solutions and, in general, problem solving with the theater troupe.

by asking questions the facilitator models how the audience and actors should interact

Marti often brought some solid facts about an issue to the discussion, and she almost always brought in information about the geographic area where the theater was performing so as to make the audience feel involved and grounded. She had a very clear idea of a skit's message, and would attempt to direct the traffic to address

that message as she recognized people with raised hands. She added her own questions when they were not forth-coming from the audience. In this way she brought out information that would enhance and elucidate the discussion.

There are various ways to introduce the process. I have presented the theater troupe to an audience of adult education students with the following introduction:

> Hello, we are the Northern New England Social Action Theater. Tonight, we are going to do some scenarios for you that involve some people you know: adult education students, tutors, teachers, husbands, wives, people in the workplace, in our schools and in our homes. Most of these scenes will represent worst case scenarios. There will be a facilitator for each scenario who will stop the scene at a crisis point. It is then that we need your help to assist these characters to solve their problems and address their predicaments. The actors will stay in character. You can help them by talking with them, addressing their dilemmas, asking them questions and making suggestions.
>
> This process will become clearer as we do the first scenario. Remember that at the end of this skit you will be asked to dialogue and ask questions of these characters. So let's begin with the initial scene called SCREW THE WORD PROBLEMS. It is located in an adult education classroom with a teacher, Ms. Abrams, and three students, Jim, Harry and another student, Dawn, who is late to class. Screw the Word Problems.

Keith Howard, the director of the CLEARWAY Improv Troupe, created credibility when he began his introduction of the performance by stating: "Welcome, we are the CLEARWAY Improv. We have performed over 400 performances before 10,000 people." Keith further heightened the suspense by telling the audience that members might, for example, see and talk with a daughter whose stepfather sexually abused her. He, too, borrowed Marti's often used phrase, "This process will become clearer as we begin the first scenario called ..."

After the first introduction, and after checking to see that the actors are ready and the props are in place, the facilitator introduces the name of the next scenario and the names of the characters as well as who they are (the student, the parent, the

teacher), and where the scene takes place (in the library, the classroom, the student's home). Given this information the audience members do not need to figure out where the scene takes place and they are free to concentrate on what the relationships are among the various actors.

Marti had a pattern of ritualistic consistency when she introduced a scenario. This pattern was as follows:

1. She announced the title of the scenario;
2. She announced the characters by name and by role (parent, teacher, student, etc.);
3. She set the stage by describing where the action was occurring;
4. She then began the action by repeating the title and hitting claves sticks together;
5. Marti ended the action by hitting the sticks together after the tag line (the scenario's title) was repeated by an actor and then she often slowly repeated the tag line in low voice for emphasis.

After four or five years of introducing scenarios in this way, the Northern New England Literacy Theater group decided to try "snippets" as an initial introduction. Their goal was not to <u>say</u> the introduction but to <u>do</u> it. Members would appear in various sections of the audience to state one phrase from one of the characters to be portrayed as the scenarios unfolded. Then they moved to the front of the room. For example, one male actor might say to another, "Whooeee, look at all these foxy ladies at this conference!" (a comment foreshadowing the harassment skit), and another actor might say to no one in particular, "With AIDS around these days you don't know whom to trust!" (an issue foreshadowing the scenario on AIDS). As soon as the actors had delivered their

the facilitator must listen, listen, listen

snippets and moved forward, the first scene would be launched without a formal introduction. The facilitator would stop the action at the end of the first scenario, then explain the process to the audience, and launch the first round of questions. The "snippet" technique proved to be a good alternate method of introducing scenarios.

Once the scenario begins, a crucial job of the facilitator begins; that job is to listen, listen, listen. The scenes are improvised, so they are always slightly different. If information is left out, it is the facilitator's job to ask questions of the characters to get that information out so the audience can be given a more complete picture. The facilitator might see new issues arising from the dialogue that are crucial issues for this particular audience to discuss. Often, as in a skit on sexual harassment, the facilitator must manage information that is very personal and unique to those specific audience members.

The facilitator is the person who ends each scenario. To do this the Northern New England group uses claves sticks because Marti had always used the sticks. The Native Americans, whom Marti trained in Montana, use a drum, and the CLEARWAY Alternative School Theater used a hand clap. (This is not as successful, I believe, because it makes some of the audience members think they should applaud.)

A good facilitator listens well while carefully observing the audience. Most audiences have never experienced the literacy theater process. In the beginning they have no idea what to expect, and when the first scenario is stopped there is dead silence. This is a good time for the facilitator to repeat for the audience the names of the characters in the skit. Then the facilitator must be ready to model the process by asking questions of the characters so they can begin to flesh out their stories. This is crucial to get the question and answer process started. The facilitator may build on the audience's questions with comments that summarize the skit's message, and/or direct the audience's attention to unexplored solutions by recommending remedies to the cast

the facilitator may direct the audience to unexplored solutions

not to the audience. Too, the facilitator may direct questions directly to the audience.

If a scenario has a very dramatic ending, it might be that the audience has no comments because they are shocked and stunned and cannot think of what to say. This always happens when the Northern New England Theater does a skit in which one of the students announces that he has AIDS after the other students have made very rude comments about gay people and demonstrated extensive ignorance about the HIV virus. In these situations, when profound silence occurs, the facilitator should allow some time for people to think quietly, and for the shock to ease. Although the silence might seem interminable to the facilitator the audience members need this quiet to experience their feelings and sort through their thoughts.

people learn by talking

The facilitator needs to be aware of the experience and training of the members of the audience. Volunteer tutors, for example, have different concerns than policy makers. It is a good idea for the whole theater troupe to discuss for whom they are doing the skits. The troupe must consider what the audience members' experiences have been and what their concerns are.

Ann Allerdt, of Bristol Community College and SABES in Massachusetts, told about performing before a business office class at their College. When they did not have much response at all to the scenarios, the theater participants quickly realized that they had not addressed the issues about which these students felt concerned. This theater group, Southeast Improvisational Drama Group, now asks teachers and students what issues they think are pertinent in their daily lives. In this manner, the group has built an extensive compilation of scenarios for staff development for teachers as well as for community college students.

Remember that some audience members learn by talking. The facilitator needs to be sensitive to each person's need to talk. She should be careful to stay away from doing any explaining or lecturing in order to ensure that the process becomes as interactive as possible. The facilitator must be alert to the raised hands in every part

of the room. She may recognize questioners by color of clothing, or number them off one, two, three so some questioners can relax knowing their chance will come. Of course, the facilitator should always call on those questioners who have not yet had a chance to speak.

In most large groups, questions from the audience must be repeated by the facilitator. This is because the questioner may have his or her back to much of the audience so that many of its members cannot hear the question. By repeating the question the facilitator does another thing: she validates what the audience member is saying.

the facilitator should repeat audience's questions and comments

The facilitator must be aware and sensitive to the audience's need to repeat questions and information. He should absolutely not allow one person to monopolize and/or lecture. If an audience member insists on being boring, the facilitator may ask if she has a question for the characters. It is important that the facilitator model respect for people and their ideas by showing respect for what people have to say even if the facilitator strongly disagrees.

People are more willing to modify or change their point of view if their own views are first validated. The facilitator may do this by repeating what they say. As the facilitator repeats different viewpoints the discussion becomes more clearly focused. People have written in performance evaluations that after seeing one of the scenarios they have changed their minds or were rethinking issues. This usually occurred because a well-facilitated discussion followed a scenario presentation.

By listening to our audience members we begin to learn who they are, what their experiences have been, and what they need from the facilitation. As the facilitator listens and learns from the audience he begins to ask the pertinent questions which will help participants arrive at possible solutions, taking the audience from where they are and showing them where they might be.

Bob Crotzer, one of Northern New England's actors, would react when an audience member would become preachy and pedantic about Bob's character, Mike, referring to Mike in the third person: "Hey, ask me the question! Talk to me! I'm sitting right here." While this approach might be appropriate for some skit characters, it would not be appropriate for the facilitator who is there to make the audience feel comfortable with the process. The facilitator might suggest, "Let's ask Mike and see how he feels about it."

When Keith Howard directed the CLEARWAY teenage improv, he would often invite a person up from the audience to rework a scene with the improv players. These skits were primarily performed in school settings with other teenagers. The principal, teacher, etc., would come forward to act out a scene demonstrating better ways to handle situations. Keith's warning about this technique was "make sure you pick the right person, someone with enough ego strength and enough 'ham' to have fun with it."

Jane Cruz, innovator and director of the Improvisation Theater Project at the Staff Development and Training Office for the Fairfax County Schools in Virginia, writes that the dialogue portion of the process is the most important part. The facilitator should not begin to solicit suggestions until a hearty dialogue has ensued. The facilitator can begin the discussion by asking, "What more do you want to know about the characters?" After the audience has unearthed information about the characters, the facilitator can ask, "What are the causes? We need to discuss the causes before the solutions." Jane also writes that audiences will begin to concentrate on non-critical aspects of the scenario because members are uncomfortable with the crucial ones. When this happens, the facilitator might try to force audience members to face the critical issue by asking questions about it, and reminding them that it is still an issue to be addressed.

the dialogue portion of the process is the most important

Stopping the scenario is a time when the facilitator can be caught napping. If the facilitator does not hear the ending line of the scenario, the actors are left dangling

in the wind with nowhere to go and not knowing what they should do, making everyone very uncomfortable including the audience who senses that something is amiss. Remember: listen, listen, listen!

Once all the scenarios are concluded, the facilitator for the Northern New England troupe asks the actors to come forward to introduce themselves and tell what they do in their real life. Often the audience is surprised to learn that the actors are adult education practitioners rather than professional actors. Many times they will have questions about how the process was started and how the actors got together and created scenarios. Teenage groups often introduce themselves at the end of their program by giving their name, age, and how long they have been acting with the improv troupe. This is a very good time to compliment audience members for their participation. The facilitator may end the process with a statement similar to Keith's, who always ends, "Thank you, you have been a great audience."

end the session by complimenting the audience

If all of the above were not enough tasks for the facilitator, she is also the time keeper for the theater troupe. She has to judge how long the questioning should go on in order for all the planned scenarios to be performed and with which scenario the entire program should end. Northern New England usually schedules one scenario and its facilitation for a fifteen minute period. As you know, most workshops and conference sessions do not begin immediately on time, so the planning for scenarios needs to take this into consideration. It is courteous to end on time, and then to hang around to talk to those audience members who wish to chat with you after the performance.

the facilitator is the timekeeper

It is the lucky theater group that finds one good facilitator. Jane Cruz reports that she has the perfect person to facilitate, a person who is not interested in acting and who has been a key factor in the troupe's success within the schools. Jane writes that the Virginia Troupe "provides the stimulus for schools and school officials to become involved in and committed to eliminating biases and cultural barriers in their lives and communities." The sensitive issues of various cultures, peoples and languages that the Virginia troupe addresses demanded the talents of a sophisticated facilitator.

the Virginia troupe provides the stimulus for schools to become committed to eliminating cultural barriers

After Marti's death, the Northern New England Theater group took turns facilitating. It was a challenge for many of us to do both acting and facilitating. Larinda Meade told me that before she started facilitating for the Maine Literacy Theater Group she went back and reviewed some of the tapes Maine had of Marti facilitating theater. This helped Larinda to identify some of Marti's techniques many of which I have tried to include here. I am sure that the Maine Office of Adult Education or the New Hampshire Office of Adult Education would be pleased to share these tapes with interested persons.

A SCENARIO FOR STUDENTS

I THOUGHT YOU GUYS WERE MY FRIENDS

Four high school students are eating lunch. Conversation begins around who is eating what for lunch. Comments from one female student, Alicia, are made about all of her exercise, weight etc. She leaves for the bathroom. The other students discuss concern over her eating habits, suspecting bulimia from overhearing her throw-up at school earlier in the week. The three students must decide if they are going to confront her or ignore the issue. When Alicia returns to the table, one student confronts her with their concern. She denies all her friends' accusations, and ends the scenario with the tag line: I thought you guys were my friends.

Copied from Concord High School Improv Theater Scenarios

A LITERACY AWARENESS SCENARIO

YOU'RE SO SMART!

Three ladies on committee for church Christmas party, meeting to finalize plans. Each lady brings two presents. One lady , a nonreader, doesn't have tags on hers. Gifts are put in a pile.

Jeanette: "Aren't those gifts wrapped pretty?" (Comments made by others regarding Christmas decorations, shipping, etc.)

Bobbie: "Well, I've put together a summary of everything and I want you to look at it." (She passes out papers.)

Kathy: Gosh, Bobbie, you're so organized. I'm glad you're on this committee."

Jeanette: "Why don't we open the presents?"

Kathy: "Jeanette, you're like a little kid. Ha Ha So excited about the presents! Yeah, let's do the fun stuff first!" (Exchange goes on.....)

Bobbie: "Here are two without name tags."

Jeanette: "Those are from me. This one is yours (handing gift to Bobbie) and this one is yours (handing gift to Kathy).

Bobbie opens her gifts. Kathy open her gifts. Jeanette opens hers from Bobbie. Then opens hers from Kathy. It is a poem and Kathy wants her to read it for Bobbie. Jeanette says that she forgot her glasses.

Kathy: (Takes poem and holds it way back for her), "Here, I'll hold it for you. Now you can see it. Go ahead, read it for Bobbie." Bobbie knows Jeanette can't read and says, "I'll read it for you Jeanette."

Kathy: "No, Jeanette, you really need to read it because it's YOU. Jeanette looks sober and says: "Kathy, we've been friends for a long time but there is something I need to tell you. I can't read.

Kathy: "Yeah, right, Come on Jeanette, read it." She suddenly realizes that Jeanette is not kidding and says, "I can't believe it! YOU'RE SO SMART!"

Copied from West Virginia Literacy Theater Scenarios

ACTORS

Who are the actors? The actors I have known in literacy scenarios have been, among others, teachers, students, directors of community based organizations, teenage mothers, librarians, state directors, literacy volunteers, public and alternative school personnel. It usually works best if the actors have some experience in the area dramatized in the scenario. During the question and answer period the actors' credibility will be challenged and if they are knowledgeable the scenario will be more believable. Of course, professional actors play the characters superbly, but because they have no experience in the world of adult education their ability to create relevant scenarios and to relate credible information is hampered.

The world of literacy is peopled with wonderful amateur actors. Just as the best professional actors seem the most natural, the literacy actors should strive to seem natural. We learn to become more natural by watching one another and also by developing the characters in our own minds: What is family life like for the characters? How many children do they have? Are they depressed? What are their hopes for the future?

actors need experience in the world of adult education

The literacy actor needs to know her character's age, occupation, point of view, education, favorite catchphrases and mannerisms. She may outline a whole biography for her character to make a unique and consistent personality. This strategy also helps during the question and answer period. Because the actor has previously thought through the character's life experiences, the audience members' questions are less likely to take her by surprise.

Our director, Marti Stevens, believed emphatically that literacy theater typecast characters: that actors must play their age and their sex and look their part. They should be instantly believable. Most of us do not have the acting skills necessary to successfully carry off portraying another sex in a three minute scenario. If the actors seem by appearances to be who they are, the audience members can focus on the relationships and the issues involved. Clarity about issues is important not the range of the actors' abilities.

the characters should be typecast

Another rule Marti insisted upon was that the actors not pretend actions but plan real actions (do not knock on doors that are not there), and that they use props. She believed that to do good mime took extensive time and training, and this was not necessary with some carefully selected props. From the first, the New Hampshire group carried a phone for a prop. Over time we developed a prop bag that included the phone plus a man's tie, paper, student workbooks, pencils, hats, fake medicine, a dish rag, scarves and Pat Nelson's baby doll in a blanket. When a person puts on a tie this prop gives a myriad of messages about his character: he is formal, he is probably not a blue collar worker, he is probably in a work environment, etc. Conversely, a baseball hat sends a whole group of different messages.

As a base outfit, Marti suggested that all the actors wear a common blue tee shirt and she asked that they wear blue denim with it. She discouraged any flashy wardrobes. She felt the audience could concentrate better on the characters being played if not distracted by the actors' personal outfits. Also, if the characters' outfits are very plain, whatever prop they put on to distinguish one character from another will be more noticeable and effective. The teenagers like the extra large, long sleeved tee shirts which seem to cover up all the rest of their extra large clothes. These shirts also establish the appropriate sameness and anonymity with which they feel comfortable.

Acting with a variety of people presents its challenges. It mandates flexibility and creativity and it keeps us from becoming too staid when the actors of roles change all the time. It is good to have a cadre of trained actors to call upon for a session. Because of people's work schedules and other commitments, it is not possible to assemble the same five people every performance.

Actors can share with each other story line and actions that have been very successful in the past. At the 1993 Commission on Adult Basic Education Conference in New Orleans, in a scenario on sexual harassment, Vermont's Louise Wright acted out a sexually aggressive teacher who talked with her student about his essay which she said was entitled "The Joy of Composting." She talked about how the compost heated up and got all warm throughout. This essay title and her lines became a classic part of Northern New England's repertoire as Louise's 'bit' was then passed on to whomever at that moment happened to be portraying the part of the seductive teacher.

The training for literacy theater, described on pages 37-45, has been most useful for developing actors because it has given people the confidence they needed to perform. During the training, participants act out a variety of experiences, first in front of just one person, then in front of two, then three, then four and then in front of the whole group. Because everyone is a participant they encourage and appreciate each person's efforts. Trainees often say that they would never have believed they would do some of the things they did in front of other people. The exercises serve to desensitize the participants about performing before others. They also serve to begin to build trust among the group of two, then three, etc.

trust is one crucial component of literacy theater

Trust is a crucial component in literacy theater. In order to do their best the actors must feel safe. They must know that if they err, the other actors will cover for them and not point out their mistake to everyone present. They must trust that a character will not put them on the spot with a surprise comment, an absurd

actors cannot deny what each other say

observation or a change in the basis of the scenario. One crucial rule of improvisation is that the actors cannot deny what another actor says. If an improvised literacy theater scenario is to move forward it must build, not swerve off in unknown directions. The group must continually think of themselves as a team, an orchestra, each valuing and supporting the others' contributions. As one might guess, this is a harder concept to have teenagers implement than adults.

Ellen Kaplan, a member of the theater department at Smith College, provided the following comments on improvisation: Nothing is a mistake in improv; justify everything; be specific; listen; pay attention; take turns; feed your partner; do it, don't just talk about it. If you act angry, you do not have to tell the audience you are angry.

Three basic acting techniques the literacy theater actors must learn and utilize are: 1) make eye contact with the other actors; 2) face front (our backs are not interesting and the audience cannot hear us); and 3) talk loudly enough to be heard by everyone. Literacy Theater actors need to be ever vigilant about making sure everyone can hear as we attempt to perform in acoustically poor gyms, libraries, hotel conference rooms and restaurants.

Another technique literacy theater uses is that the actors never physically leave the stage. They indicate they are leaving by turning their backs to the audience. This seems to work effectively; the audience seems to accept it, and it saves people wandering in and out since we hardly ever perform on a stage with wings for entrances and exits. When the scenario begins the actors can walk on the stage area when their name is called, and turn their back to the audience if they are not in the beginning of the scene. CLEARWAY Improv begins a scenario with all of the characters standing on the stage area with their back to the audience; and when their character's name is announced, each actor turns to face the audience and then turns

back again. To add variety, Marti liked to have characters enter the scene talking to each other when they were introduced to the audience. For each scenario, the actors and facilitator need to decide how they are going to start the process.

One of the most difficult and important tasks for the actor in literacy theater is Marti's principle that the actor should talk in sentences, not paragraphs. When we first develop a scenario, there is a temptation for the actors to go on and on about their situation as they begin to flesh out all the various ramifications and story lines of the scenario. It is at this point in the development of the scenario that the group needs to remind itself that the actors should talk in sentences and begin to distill down the information that is absolutely essential for the scenario to work. Marti taught us that audience members bring a lifetime of experiences to a scene. Because of these experiences they can gather lots of information from a few sentences. It is absolutely not necessary to explain everything. Those things the audience is curious about will be answered in the question-and-answer period where once again the actors must remind themselves to talk in sentences not paragraphs. It is the interchange that is interesting, not one actor's details of his situation. This principle also allows the scene to become a mosaic of characters' thoughts rather than having one or two characters' opinions dominate. It also allows the audience's issues to become paramount. Finally it is far more aesthetically pleasing to have each character participate with some repartee rather than to hear a speech.

actors should talk in sentences not paragraphs

The actor also needs to think about how the information he relays affects the direction of the question and answers and how it affects the issue that the scenario is attempting to address. When I have portrayed Crystal, an abused woman, if I said that my husband did not like me to go to literacy tutoring sessions, the audience would focus on the premise that he was jealous of my learning to read and would not focus on the issue that I had been physically abused. Therefore, I would tell the audience that he did not know about it when they asked me what my husband

thought about my being tutored. This forced them to face the physical abuse Crystal was enduring, and begin to address the issues that this dramatization presented.

Because the facilitator introduces the scenarios the audience members know who the actors are, and where the scene is taking place. It then becomes the literacy actors' missions to immediately begin to establish their relationship with each other.

The audience is inherently interested in the drama of what the relationships are and what is the status of each person within that relationship. The choreography of the scenario allows the relationships to expose the issues, issues that should be clear to all the actors. If the issues are not clear, each actor is responsible for clarifying with the group and the facilitator exactly what the issues are in the scenario. This does not mean that the actor should tell the audience what the issues are. Quite the reverse, the actor should present the situational relationships that expose issues for the audience to identify and then problem solve, assessing the problem and its solutions. This is the job of the audience members, and the actors are the tools that enable them to do their work.

audiences are inherently interested in the drama of relationships

Another challenge for the actors is to know when to be funny and when not to. The time not to is usually when it does not fit within the parameters of the character they are playing. It is very tempting to make a joke out of every comment because the audience laughs and this encourages the actors to feel they are being highly entertaining. It is the classic problem of the ham. Hamming it up does not enhance a scenario, but the decorous use of humor does. Practice and performances develop the skills of timing and humor. Marti would also tell me that a comment might be funny the first time, but not the second, third or fourth. She urged us continually not to play for laughs. If you have a secure group of actors on a team they can share with each other the boundaries that each should maintain around their funny comments. No doubt this is the highest level of team work and requires

extraordinary tact because in acting we expose ourselves with all our vulnerabilities. (In Chapter VI, pages 35-36, I list some suggestions given by Liz Lerman of the Dance Exchange on how members of a group may help to critique each other.)

Audience members sometimes come to the process expecting it to be exactly like the improvisations they have seen in comedy clubs or on TV. At first they will attempt to make a joke and laugh at everything. All the literacy theater actors can do is continue on with their planned scenarios remaining in character and responding to the jokes as their particular character would have. Eventually, the nature of the process and its serious aspects become clear to everyone in attendance. The actors need patience and perseverance.

The actor in a scenario must listen and focus, focus and listen, throughout the scenario as well as the question-and-answer period. He needs to know what each character has said in order to respond appropriately. Sometimes during the question and answer time the actors who were quibbling in the scenario will continue to quibble. This, while great fun for the actors, does not enhance the process. The actors' relationships have already been established and it does not improve the question and answer time to have the squabbles continue. The audience already has the idea, so the actors should maintain their attitudes toward each other but forgo the glee they find in sniping at one another.

actors should focus and listen, listen and focus

The biggest surprise in literacy theater is that once the scenario stops the actors stay in character to respond to the audience. It is also the most effective part of the process because this is when it becomes interactive theater and this is when critical thinking and collaborative problem solving begin to take place. Because they have not experienced this process before, initially audience members do not understand it; therefore, it is crucial that the actors stay in character. If the actors are able to do this the audience is quick to get the idea, and hands begin to fly up as participants ask questions of the characters to find out more about them.

If characters giggle at their own and each other's comments or make asides that are out of character, the audience becomes confused as to whom they are really addressing. At first almost all new scenario actors are tempted to giggle and laugh because the process makes them nervous, but this is not appropriate unless the character would have laughed. Each actor must concentrate on remaining in character and keeping her own personality out of the fray regardless of how embarrassing her character's attitudes might be. This gives the audience members the opportunity to more freely articulate their feelings and thoughts about the issues.

actors must stay in character

Like the facilitator, the actors should be aware of the audience members and what their experiences with literacy might have been. Are they librarians, rotarians, state directors? Each group will require different scenarios, but the actors will also want to respond differently because of the level of sophistication of the audience. The teenage improv actors always get to know their audience by asking, "How old are these kids going to be?" Teens will respond differently to different age groups because they clearly understand the subtle differences between 14 and 16 in our age-graded society.

During the question-and-answer period, the actors will face assertive accusers, the kindest, most thoughtful questioners, soapbox types, sexists, classicists, and racists among others. The actor must deal with each as she feels her character would, so it is important that the actor speculate about how her character might respond, being cognizant of the fact that this should be a learning experience for the audience to broaden awareness of the students' lives as well as the issues that exist in their world. In other words, what can the character say that might enlighten the audience's viewpoints? This is a serious task for the actors who must continually remind themselves that their role is not to preach or to solve the problem for the audience.

I have come to believe that some of the most satisfying scenarios for the audience are those in which the audience members are able to persuade the actors to

move a little from the intransigent positions their characters have taken. This is certainly up to the discretion of the actor—how and when he will do this. Timing is a crucial factor in how effective the character's evolving attitude change will be. Each time it will be different because the questions are different and the audience is different, and usually the other actors are different.

Actors set the stage with furniture and props for the next scenario in improv. This usually just involves moving a table and a few chairs. Art Ellison always did this very unobtrusively for Northern New England's Literacy Theater, and one time when he was not scheduled to appear, no one in the group changed the set. We found ourselves scurrying around setting up chairs and tables after the scenario had been announced. We had become too accustomed to Art doing all the scene changes, so it's a good idea to review who will be responsible after each scene to set the stage.

Some of my best times doing scenarios have been with teenage improv actors. We first combined efforts at several homeless conferences and the results were mesmerizing because the potency of a homeless child speaks much louder to us than a homeless adult. Teenagers have a wonderful naturalness, and often a good use of humor that touches everyone. Adults performing with teenagers give the real life models of bad principals, parents and teachers against which teens may rail.

As a final note, here are five guideposts for acting offered by Pat Sandoval, an instructor at Holyoke Community College:

> Guidepost 1: Relationship – not just who the other person is but how you feel about her/him.
>
> Guidepost 2: Conflict – without it the scene is boring.
>
> Guidepost 3: Humor – there is humor in everything, but not jokes. Know the difference.
>
> Guidepost 4: Opposites – love/hate, sad/happy exist together.
>
> Guidepost 5: Importance – if you don't make what you are doing important to you, nobody else will care.

A SCENARIO

THIS IS NOT MY LAST STOP

Three Characters:

ABE Program Director – Vic Harrison

ABE Teacher – Ann O'Connell

Advocate for the DD student – Tony Valenti

Student's name – Daryl Latimore

An advocate, Tony, from the local developmental disabilities advocacy group meets a teacher in her classroom after class to question why Daryl Latimore will no longer be able to attend. Teacher responds that she has finally finished the assessment after eight weeks, and it has been determined, according to program policy, that Daryl cannot show sufficient progress to continue; therefore, his slot must go to another student from the waiting list for whom the program will be more beneficial.

After enough dialogue to set the scene, Vic, the program director, enters the classroom. He asks if the teacher is coming to the staff meeting. Tony pushes forward determinedly, introduces himself and begins to berate the director, quoting the American for Disabilities' Act requirements.

The program director pulls the teacher aside. Ann explains that she described the program's policy on 'being capable of progressing.' Ann leaves. The director then tells the advocate that it has been decided The case is closed. When he turns to leave the room the advocate grabs his arm and says, " This is not my last stop!"

SCENARIOS

Creating a good scenario is the most important and difficult job for the literacy theater team. A good scenario presents issues that concern people. Issues ignored in this society because they are too divisive, complex, unspeakable, or emotional, so ironic they make us laugh, or so banal they make us tired. A scenario may give messages at a variety of levels. It may address the most personal specific individual concern through characterization (a thirty-five year old man unable to read to his child), or the broad consequences of a national policy which ignores the provision of education for undereducated adults.

Northern New England has developed scenarios by identifying issues and conflicts that concerned its own members. Some of those have been workplace literacy (company needs versus employee needs); spousal abuse (literacy tutor's concerns versus student's personal privacy); AIDS (prejudice and exclusion versus respect and inclusion); sexual harassment (personal views of behavior versus audience views of motivation and behavior).

identify issues and conflicts that concern members

A scenario must present conflict in order for dialogue to take place. This is why we say it is often a worst case scenario. This is the salient feature that distinguishes literacy theater from role playing.

After team members decide what problems they want to address and why they would want to present and discuss these issues they need to brainstorm how best to dramatize a situation that would address all the members' issues and concerns. They need to force the audience to think and feel. Once the dramatization and

characters are identified the actors can begin to talk through the scenario. At this point people will be long-winded and preachy as they attempt to identify what type of character they are playing. Do not despair. Group members should not get critical before they get creative. The group can't create and criticize at the same time. The group should first create and then criticize (Novelly, 1985).

Once the basic framework is set, the actors should attempt to pare down, delete and edit their dialogue, remembering that characters should speak in sentences not paragraphs. Much information will come out in the question-and-answer part of the process. Good editing by each individual actor of his character's responses makes a good scenario. Once again let me repeat, it is the interaction among the actors that is interesting.

While talking through the new scenario, an actor will say a phrase which everyone will agree would be a good ending line (tag line). Then this phrase becomes the name of the scenario. It should be a phrase that will pique the audience's interest. The West Virginia troupe created my favorite title phrase for a scenario: "But you're so smart!". The scenario was about an illiterate adult who had been embarrassed into telling her friends that she couldn't read. The title elucidates all the messages this scenario seeks to relay.

Now the characters need names. This may not seem important initially but it is an essential part of the characterization. A Crystal is different from an Allison. Jeffrey is different from Amelio. Last names too can give out much information about the character.

If actors use their own names it is harder for them to differentiate between how the character might feel and how they personally feel. This is especially true when working with teenagers. They need to be very clear that people in the audience reacting negatively to their character are not acting negatively toward them personally. One way to help them do this is to address them by their characters' names and not their own name.

The scenario will begin once the facilitator announces its name and the names and roles of the characters. The beginning of the scenario is planned and the ending is planned, and all the actors have a good idea of what is to occur in the middle. If there are several scenes in the scenario, the cue words or phrases must be agreed upon so actors may enter and leave the scenario appropriately on cue.

It has been the experience of the Northern New England Literacy Theater that when the members gathered to develop scenarios it might take hours for the first one to come together and then the rest would seem to fall into place with much more ease. I have never understood this process but I have experienced it often enough to be able to predict accurately that this would happen. At first when the initial scenario took hours to develop I would worry that we would never have enough time to be able to create the needed number of scenarios, but we always did. There is a part of the process that develops on an unconscious level. With a group of people it takes time for all the concerns to be expressed and synthesized, and the characters to be developed and dramatized in a scene.

Once everyone understands the basic parameters of the scenario and the scenario has been run through several times, it is time to quit and to give everyone a break. Whether consciously or unconsciously, actors need time to think about the situation, the characters and the interaction among all of these different components. When the group comes together again the interaction will be better, and the dialogue crisper.

Planning a series of scenarios to be presented for a conference or program presents the challenge of the cook planning a good meal. There should be comic and sad scenarios, scenarios with good, bad and indifferent characters, scenarios in a variety of places and scenarios presenting a variety of issues, some blatant, some subtle. In all cases, each scenario should structure situations that present serious concerns for the audience, regardless of the framework used to present it.

When creating scenarios, groups need to develop a wide range of situations that call forth an equally wide range of emotions. This is the epitome of the creative process in literacy theater. While the audience responds to the acting, it is the synthesis of the parts of a good scenario that provides the acting vehicle. If a scenario is not good, no amount of good acting will make it a thoughtful and provocative one that provides a powerful message. It is the scenario's structure around specific issues that sends the strongest message. The actors are there as the messenger.

SCENARIOS FOR TEENAGERS

MAYBE IT WAS MY FAULT

Tara is in class telling her best friend, Lisa, about a comment Mr. Baxter, their English teacher had made: "I really like it when you walk up to my desk to hand in your homework, Tara, because it's so nice to watch you walking away." Tara is frightened by this and Lisa is outraged. Mrs. Davis approaches the girls and tells them to get back to work on the polynomials. Tara tells Mrs. Davis that she thinks Mr. Baxter sexually harassed her. Mrs. Davis tells Tara it is nothing. He was just kidding. He is a very popular teacher , but she worries about the way the girls come to school dressed in short tops, short shorts and short skirts. She tells the girls to get back to their work. She leaves. Lisa urges Tara to tell her story to someone else. Tara delivers the tag line, "Maybe it was my fault."

NO ONE ELSE WILL GO OUT WITH YOU

Laura is telling her friend, Stan, about the great date she had Friday night. They went to dinner, then to a movie and had a really great time, and she really wants Stan to meet this guy. He is very excited for her until she mentions that her date's name is Manuel and that he is from Puerto Rico. He becomes very abusive about her dating a "spic" and how now she's going to be "damaged goods." She protests that Manny is a great guy and that she is just dating him. Stan delivers the tag line.

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CHAPTER VI

ACTUALLY PERFORMING

Each literacy theater group will have to develop its own procedures for getting a performance accomplished. I can explain some the techniques Northern New England Social Action Group and New Hampshire used. Art Ellison did ninety-nine per cent of this work along with the New Hampshire Adult Education Office secretary, Jeanne Chaput. Hundreds of times, in forty-six different states, they always managed to get five to six people to show up and accomplish performances.

Organizations requesting a literacy theater performance would be referred to Art, who would ask about the group, where the performance would be, how much time was available, and what the facilities would be like, among other details. If the performance was close by in New Hampshire, Art would send out an agenda a month ahead of time to specific actors giving details about the performance and the scenarios to be done and who would be portraying whom. An example of this is in Appendix B. If the person could not fit the performance into her schedule she would let Art know and he would find a replacement.

However, if the performance was in San Francisco he used a different procedure. He would send out a mailing to all the actors in Northern New England to tell them about the trip, the dates, and ask them to return an enclosed form if they were interested in going. Then, of course, he had the difficult time of deciding who would be selected to go. For each performance he tried to have someone from all three Northern New England states participate. It was also important to give people a variety of roles. This variety made the scenarios more interesting for the audience as well as the actors. After he made the selection he would send out a list of scenarios, detailing who was to act in them and where all the participants would meet

in San Francisco to rehearse. Each person made their own travel arrangements scheduled to be at the location in time for the first rehearsal.

It is a very good idea to schedule rehearsals before the performance. This gives everyone a review of what he or she is going to do, and, more importantly, with whom they are going to do it. Many times when we got together with the Maine and Vermont actors, there would be actors who had not met each other. The rehearsal time gives people an arena in which to debrief after their journey to the site and to get to know each other. From our experience, I would recommend that you never rely on hotel desk clerks to relay messages. If and when we had trouble *rendezvousing* it was caused by leaving a message at the desk and trusting the clerks to deliver it.

Participants will always have questions about the room where the performance will take place, so everyone should check it out before the session. If possible, actors should familiarize themselves with how to use the microphones when they are needed. If somehow you can arrange for a lesson on using different microphones you will avoid the squeals, squawks and heavy breathing caused by amateurs. Too, this information and practice give the actors confidence, making their job of seeming natural easier.

Immediately after the performance it is a good idea to schedule time for the entire group to sit down and process what happened during the session while what actually occurred is still fresh in everyone's mind. This is important because the same group will probably not be together again in the near future.

Northern New England Literacy Theater group had a person who served as the director of the scenarios (Marti Stevens) and a person who served the functions of a producer (Art Ellison). The Maine group did much the same with Marti as director and Larinda Meade doing the job of contacting the performance site, negotiating arrangements, getting actors there, etc. Larinda compiled a book of scenarios. She requested actors to bring this book to all their performing sessions. An example of

the form they used for their book is on page 8, 53 and 54. The Southeast SABES theater in Massachusetts does most of its work by going into classrooms at the community college and performing before teachers in SABES. In Maryland, the group hires a drama director who is not involved in literacy.

This may be a good time to discuss difficult people. One state's literacy theater group ended when actors became competitive and virulent toward each other. One dominant, insistent, shall we say bossy, person can ruin the development of a scenario as well as everyone's joy in performing and facilitating it. No doubt we all like to see it our way. Especially in the creative process we may become irrationally involved. There needs to be a way in which the group can address a domineering person either as a team, or with one person who serves as the director, a person who assumes authority and is given permission to do so by the group.

Liz Lerman, founding director of Dance Exchange, in "Toward a Process for Critical Response" gives excellent suggestions for providing feedback for others' creative work. Below I synthesize her discussion of four steps she feels are important and may be helpful with our work of creating or redefining an improvisation.

> Step One - AFFIRMATION-Ms. Lerman says that it is her sense that no matter how short the performance, people want to hear that what they have just completed has meaning. For instance, one might say, "When you did such-and-such it was surprising, challenging, evocative, compelling, delightful, unique, touching, poignant, different for you, interesting, etc."

> Step Two - THE ARTIST AS QUESTIONER—Let the artists(actors/facilitator) ask the question first. The more the actors clarify what they are working on the more intense and deep the dialogue becomes. These questions need to be quite specific. The group may help each other develop questions and specificity. But the actor needs to raise the question first.

> Step Three - OBSERVERS ASK THE QUESTIONS—The observers form their criticism—"It's too long"—into a neutral question, "What is the most important idea you were trying to

convey?" Working to form a neutral question is precisely the process necessary to get to the questions that matter for the actor. "For some it might seem like giving up the right to tell the truth very directly." Ms. Lerman says, "What I have found for myself, however, is that I can say whatever is important through this mechanism and that what I can't say probably couldn't be heard, or isn't relevant."

Step Four - OPINION TIME—If an observer really has an observation that can't be stated in a neutral question then he may ask the actor if he can state his opinion on a specific topic. The actor may say no. She is not ready at this time for anyone's opinion. Usually, of course, she will be willing to hear the opinion, but the giver of the opinion should first ask permission.

A SCENARIO FOR ADULTS AND TEENAGERS

BUT SHE STARTED IT

Takes place in two scenes. In first, Marisa, a high school student, is hanging out in Mr. Osborn's room after school, telling him how fascinated she was by is lecture on the Algonquin Round Table and how much he knows about Dorothy Parker. He quotes Parker's best lines, and she is very impressed. He asks her how her boyfriend is doing, and she says she's broken up with him. He was just a kid -- too immature for her. She wants someone who's sophisticated and has been around the world. The whole time, she is staring at him, smiling and acting flirtatious and shy at the same time. He closes by repeating Parker's telegram from her honeymoon to an editor who wanted to know where a story was -- " I've been too f--ing busy and vice versa." Scene ends.

In the second scene, Mr. Osborn is called into Mr. Chapin's office and told that Marisa's mother has been on the phone to complain about sexual harassment of her daughter. Osborn is shocked that such a thing could have happened at school -- and even more shocked when he finds out he is the alleged culprit. They banter back and forth about school policy and what happened, and Mr. Banter delivers the tag line.

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TRAINING

The training we have done has been modeled primarily on the work and exercises Marti Stevens used to train the original group of adult educators. These exercises and their purposes included some of the following:

ACTIVITY NAME: SIGNATURE

DESCRIPTION: With participants standing in a circle, each person chooses an action that represents how he or she feels at the moment. One at a time, each member enters the circle, states his or her first name, and performs the chosen action. The other group members then step together into the circle and copy this action while saying the person's name.

PURPOSE: This is a nonthreatening introduction that gives participants a way to participate through body movement. It helps to make people feel more relaxed.

ACTIVITY NAME: RHYTHM

DESCRIPTION: With participants standing in a circle, everyone claps their thighs twice with both hands, claps their hands together twice and snaps the fingers of their right hand and then their left hand. The persons who have done this before keep doing it until the whole group becomes proficient at it and a rhythm is developed.

Then the group counts off. Numbers are said when the fingers are snapped. One by one participants say their own number first when they snap the fingers of their right hand and someone else's number when they snap the fingers of their left hand. When someone's number is called, while keeping the rhythm going, the person whose number it is calls out his own number on the first snap and then someone else's number on the second snap, and so the game continues.

As the group becomes more proficient the leader can speed up the tempo to increase the challenge of the activity. If members have difficulty the group should continue the rhythm until they are able to accomplish the task.

PURPOSE: This activity demonstrates how crucial it is to focus on what is going on at that very moment. If people are not listening, they will not respond when their number is called. It also demonstrates how nervous we may become when we are called upon to react. Most importantly it demonstrates how a team may continue on even when all is not going perfectly, and that it is not necessary to stop and bring attention to participants' errors.

ACTIVITY NAME: MIRRORING

DESCRIPTION: Group divides into pairs, with one partner designated as A and the other as B. As the pair stands facing each other. A begins by making slow, gentle motions with his/her body; these actions are mirrored by the B person. The motions may increase in difficulty as the partners become more comfortable with each other. At the facilitator's signal, B slowly and subtly assumes the lead. Pairs are instructed to maintain eye contact while they are doing this activity.

PURPOSE: Actors need to make eye contact with each other and they should be aware of this. This activity also demonstrates to people whether they are more comfortable leading or following. The facilitator for this activity should process with the group their feelings about eye contact, which is usually harder for male/female combinations than same sex pairs, and about whether they preferred leading or following.

This act of making eye contact is one activity where cultures differ greatly, and at a session Marti led in Montana with persons belonging to the Crow, Cheyenne and Arapaho Native American Tribes, they shared that it was impolite in their cultures to make eye contact. Thus, Marti did not ask them to do it. Participants' comfort level should be a prime concern during training.

ACTIVITY NAME: SIMULTANEOUS TALKING AND LISTENING

DESCRIPTION: The same pairs choose a topic on which to speak for approximately 2-3 minutes. This topic may be on anything they know that they can talk about for 2 minutes

straight without stopping. Both partners speak at the same time. At the end of 2-3 minutes the facilitator stops the activity and asks each participant to report back to the group what his/her partner was talking about.

PURPOSE: This exercise demonstrates that some people can talk and listen at the same time. Of course, some people will be so involved in what they are saying they will not have any idea what their partner was saying. The group also finds out more about the other people in the group and what their interests are.

ACTIVITY NAME: ONOMATOPOEIA FUN

DESCRIPTION: Each pair is given two words which trainees are to say in an onomatopoetic manner while doing an action that also demonstrates the words' sound or meaning. They are instructed to perform these two words three times in any sequence they wish. The pairs are given about four minutes to decide what they will do. Then each pair is asked to perform their words before the others. Some word combinations which can be put on index cards to give each pair include

squishy, hard	wishful, efficient
nervous, calm	wavy, bouncy
rustle, crunch	fluffy, smooth
cold, hot	sizzle, slippery
giggly, depressed	float, sink
tiny, giant	light, dark
happy, ecstatic	peppy, insane
flutter, ripple	scary, forceful

PURPOSE: This exercise allows the participants to combine their verbal and physical actions, and it is the first time the pair will perform before the other participants. It also requires the participants to plan the act with their partners.

ACTIVITY NAME: NURSERY RHYMES

DESCRIPTION: Each pair now joins another pair to form a group of four. The group is asked to choose one nursery rhyme that they act out and present in a genre of opera, rap, string quartet, country, or blues music, etc. After five minutes to practice each group performs before the others. The audience members then guess what genre the performers were using.

PURPOSE: This is the first activity the trainees will do in a small group. Their group of two has grown to four and they must make group decisions to accomplish the task. Also they will be performing in front of the others. Because the task is not terribly difficult and "everyone is in the same boat," this activity is always a lot of fun; it decreases people's anxiety about doing things in front of others.

ACTIVITY NAME: MARCHING 1,2,3,4

DESCRIPTION: Two lines are formed facing each other, with each trainee across from his partner. The A's stand in one line and the B's in the other. The A line is instructed to march to the center in four steps while saying, "One, two, three, four." The B line is then instructed to march forward four steps to meet them, saying, "Five, six, seven, eight." They shake hands with their partner while saying, "Shake, shake, shake." Then both lines step back at the same time saying, "Back, two, three, four."

The facilitator can have the group practice this until they have the sequence of actions learned. Then the facilitator should show the first person in line A an index card which no one else may see. The index card gives a description or a character that the person should enact. The person acts this part while doing the marching and counting sequence stepping four steps into the middle facing his or her partner standing across from him or her in line B. Next, because the B partner has not seen the index card, the B partner has to guess and mimic what the first actor is doing as he or she marches into the center saying his or her part, "Five, six, seven, eight." The two meet in the middle and do the "Shake, shake, shake," shaking hands and return to their line, stepping backwards, still acting out the instructions from the index card, reciting, in unison, "Back, two, three, four."

The non-acting trainees standing in line then guess what the actors were portraying. Once they guess correctly the next person in line is given an index card to enact. There will be much applause and laughter during this exercise. It is a very self-actualizing experience for many of the participants. Some index card topics have included:

Queen Elizabeth	On a first date
Hiking on a mountain	Old person
On a cold day	Telephoning a friend

A cowboy (cowgirl)	Chased by a mugger
Sad, dejected person	Telling someone off
On a windy day	Aerobics instructor
On a hot day	Chased by a bee
A dance instructor	Smelling flowers
Walking a dog	Having a sneezing fit
Miss America	Wrestler
Telling gossip	A clumsy person
Playing volleyball	A baseball player
Jumping rope	A very shy person
An ice skater	A bored person
A toddler	A seductive person

PURPOSE: This is the first time that the trainees will use dialogue and act out a series of specified actions. I tell the trainees that there are parts of scenarios that they must memorize. This exercise calls on people to be creative, and to be unselfconscious. Everyone is in same situation of having to perform alone before the whole group for the first time. The group is always supportive and appreciative of each other's efforts, giving each person more confidence; so if you repeat this exercise, letting line B go first, you will see that trainees become better and better as their confidence grows.

ACTIVITY NAME: SINGLE WORD COLORING

DESCRIPTION: The group forms a circle and the facilitator selects two people to enter the center of the circle. She shows each of the two a different word on an index card. The instructions are for the actors to say this word and this word only, and they are to interact with each other as they do this, shading the meaning of the words. They should say them softly, angrily, screaming, sobbing, laughing, etc. Once they have discovered together a variety of ways to do the words, the

facilitator stops them and the group processes what they liked watching them do. Then the facilitator selects two more people to do the exercise. Some words on the index cards include:

Naughty	Good-bye	Go away
I can't	Busy	Snob
Don't	Party	Great
Whisper	Idiot	Worried
Why	Smart	Now
Listen	Money	Never
Never mind	Please	Stop
Not me	Look	Lost
Itch	It's OK	Pretty
Shut up	Hold me	Yes

PURPOSE: This exercise demonstrates to the participants how crucial the emphasis is that one gives to a word. It is not necessarily the word itself that is important but how it is said and with how much feeling and energy. It also demonstrates for the group how one may respond to their partner in a myriad of ways, each way changing the meaning of the action.

ACTIVITY NAME: SOAP OPERA

DESCRIPTION: Remaining in a circle, the facilitator selects two people to come into the center. One person is given a phrase. That person is instructed to start a dialogue with the other person by using that phrase to begin. Then she may stop the dialogue by repeating the same phrase. Both participants need to work to keep the dialogue going by feeding each other information to move the skit along and to make it interesting. Some phrases we have used for this exercise have included:

How long has this been going on?

It wouldn't be the first time.

You've got to tell her.

I'm not the one with the problem.

I wasn't sure you'd like it.

Please don't leave.

We gave you everything.

You're going to be late.

I can't forgive you.

I know more than you think.

It's none of your business.

Don't tell anybody.

If you love me you would.

What's wrong with you?

PURPOSE: This activity forces people to think quickly on their feet. By observing others they see how important it is for people to establish relationships in a skit, and how important it is to establish status in the relationship in order for the audience to understand better what is happening. This is a good time to talk about "blocking" or "denying" what information the other actor is giving and how these are not appropriate actions during improv (see pg. 22). Also this is a good exercise to demonstrate how much information the audience brings to the improv. Ask the group about the characters in the skit and they will be able to tell you a great deal that they assumed about the characters from what was said in just three or four minutes of skit improvisation. Point out to the participants how very much they inferred and that it is not necessary to tell every detail in an improv in order for the audience to understand.

One other activity that I like to use to emphasize an acting technique has been Telephone. When we do this I ask the participants to face front, and I remind them when they forget. The facilitator could use this activity for emphasizing any presentation technique that he feels the group needs to improve or practice.

ACTIVITY NAME: TELEPHONE

DESCRIPTION: One participant is given a telephone to use. The facilitator asks the person to respond to whoever is on the phone. While the participant is doing this, the facilitator sends in others to complicate the scenario. The facilitator quietly tells one participant at a time to go into the scene as—mother, neighbor, girlfriend, cousin, friend, plumber, etc. When the

scene becomes too chaotic, the facilitator should stop it and go on to another one. Some people we have suggested were on the other end of the telephone line have been:

The landlord	Your child's principal
Your old girlfriend or boyfriend	Your 16-year-old calling from the towing garage
Your doctor with bad news	Your ex-spouse
The bill collector	The animal pound

The last exercise in the training session consists of dividing into groups, developing a scenario, and performing it in front of the others, including questions and responses with the audience. People generally need at least one-half hour to develop the scenario and practice it. Then the facilitator should attempt to allow 10 to 15 minutes for the performance of each scenario. The total amount of time needed will depend on how many groups are involved. When planning the schedule of activities for a workshop the facilitator needs to know that the more people there are the longer some activities will take. In a large group not everyone will be able to do every activity. Twenty-five participants is the maximum that would be reasonable for a training.

All of the above suggestions for training and developing scenarios assume that the people in the workshop have seen the process so they have some understanding of it. If they have not seen the process the facilitator should try to have some people model how it works by performing a scenario and going through the question-and answer- period. It is hard for us to understand what we have not experienced. One of Marti's rules in a training workshop was that people were not allowed to watch, that everyone must be a participant.

The training described in this chapter is primarily designed to develop confidence to enable trainees to perform comfortably in front of others. With an awareness of a few presentation techniques they are able to get by. The training also develops lots of enthusiasm and energy for the project. Ideally this should be a whole day activity, although many times because of the demands of conference schedules it

is cut to three hours. If a group wants to develop a group of scenarios then they need to plan, at a minimum, an additional three or four hours to sort through the issues and create the scenarios.

The facilitator may bring closure to the training with an ending activity. Marti used to have all of us stand in a circle holding hands. We would go around the circle one at a time with each person thanking the person on their right for being there and participating in the experience and then Marti would have the whole group lift their arms and say thank you to each other in unison.

I have included a bibliography of books on improvisation. They have extensive lists of exercises for building acting skills. Art Ellison works with a group of teenagers from New Hampshire's Concord High School. He recommends *Acting Games by* Marsh Cassady and *Theatre Games for Young Performers* by Maria C. Novelly for a compilation of improvisation activities for youngsters. These two texts' exercises for developing acting skills are equally good for adults. It is a very lucky group that will have the time to experience many of these good improvisational games.

A SCENARIO

YOU'RE TOO OLD TO LEARN

Characters: Husband and wife, John and Mary

John and Mary are in the kitchen sitting around the table.

John: I'm going to take some of your money from your money jar and go down and shoot a little pool with the boys.

Mary: Oh, let me go get the money for you.

John: I'll get it. I have to change my shirt. I want to look good.

John leaves the room and proceeds to rummage for change. Picks up a book and walks back to confront his wife.

John: What in the hell is this?

Mary: I heard on the radio that they would teach you how to read and the class was at the Community Center. And I thought I would...

John: You thought, that was your first mistake. I don't want everybody in this town to know that my old lady can't read. I make the money. I take you to the store. I buy you clothes and shoes when you need it. Ain't that enough for you.

Mary: I just wanted to be able to read the labels and to use the recipes that the neighbors give me.

John: Well, just forget it.

Mary: They promised me that everything would be kept secret.

John: You are too old to learn.

Copied from West Virginia Literacy Theater Scenarios

THEATER WITH TEENAGERS

As one participates in literacy theater it becomes clearer why this theater process began with teenagers. Teenagers have strong feelings about what they perceive to be injustices in the world, and they also need a vehicle where they can express their feelings and emotions. Also improv works best with actors who seem very natural in their improv setting. Teens are able to appear natural and mimic with uncanny ability. Marti felt mimicry is a skill that one loses as one grows older. Teens are also great at humor and some develop superb timing when dealing with the audience's questions. I refer to some additional issues that arise in teen theater on pages 15, 16, 20, 26, 30, and 45.

There are concerns, however, that are endemic to the age group. One issue is with whom they are to be performing. To avoid cliques and hurt feelings, it may be advisable to continually rotate the participants in each group as well as what part they do. This keeps the group from being reliant on very few people.

Before starting the Concord Teen Group, Art Ellison, Administrator of the Bureau of Adult Education in New Hampshire, read that often theater improvisational activities with teenagers often degenerate into the teens busily giggling, tussling and scuffling with each other. He reports that, indeed, this did turn out to be true.

One other characteristic of this age group was mentioned in the chapter on acting. Children are experts on age groups. For instance, they clearly know the difference between a fifteen-year-old and a sixteen-year-old, information adults do not

necessarily have because they are not part of the teen culture. One of the first questions that will be asked in a scenario during the questioning time is, "How old are you?" Because of this, Keith Howard, the director of the teenage CLEARWAY Improv, would give the characters' ages when he introduced their names.

Generally, the instructor with teens needs to work on voice projection. Because the actors are talking about the most intimate of subjects it will be hard for them to project their voices. Projection is something the group might practice all together. Also when working with teens, we have found that they continually move back away from the audience. Art Ellison found a solution to this by having them work in front of a table This stopped their retreat.

It is great to watch how much status pupils in high school receive from younger students, and how respectful and responsive the younger students are to the older ones. It is this dynamic that makes the teen theater so effective in teaching other children. Art Ellison and I worked with the CLEARWAY Improv students in an alternative school in Nashua, New Hampshire. We played the bad parents, bad teachers, bad principals and adults. We were continually enthralled by the theater's ability to reach all age groups from elementary school upward. The school staff would report that we had involved students who usually did not participate in school activities. Sometimes the school staff became very involved in the question-and-answer period.

the theater reaches all age groups

Keith Howard, who was the director of CLEARWAY, met with interested students twice a week for 45 minutes each time. The students made up all their scenarios during these sessions. Then Keith would make suggestions and set up a scenario schedule for performances. This included what scenario they were going to do and who was playing each part. He did almost all of the facilitating and usually took three or four students for each performance. The students were paid approximately $25 each time they performed. While traveling to performances,

Keith would use the time in the car to rehearse the scenarios. He amassed a master list of scenarios that included some of the following topics:

A 16 year old dating a 28 year old married man

A teacher ignoring a sexual harassment incident reported to her by students

A boy expecting a date to "pay up" after he bought dinner

Three girls in a heated pro-life, pro-choice discussion

A student who is continually cutting herself when she feels sad

A homophobic student who finds out his girlfriend's father is gay

A teacher who maintains to a struggling female algebra student that boys do better in math because "It is something in their brains."

A boyfriend and girlfriend who have been seeing each other for four months. She is ready to start having sex. He is not.

A thirteen year old luring a twelve year old to smoke

A student who uses the N word

A teenager who finds out that his/her parent is using drugs

An anorexic girl who won't share her problem with her concerned friends

A 11 year old who finds a condom in her 17 year old sister's room

This is only a minuscule description of the scenarios created by the teens, but aren't they interesting? Wouldn't you like to see them?

CLEARWAY funds the theater, in part, by charging for a performance. Usually the schools where they are asked to perform will pay out of funds earmarked for drug and alcohol education. CLEARWAY Improvisational Theater is also partially funded through grants from the Centers for Disease Control, the New Hampshire Department of Education and the New Hampshire Governor's Office.

If teenage actors were reluctant to participate in performances out of town, they could almost always be lured by promises of food, pizza and fast food restaurants.

This cost for meals, the transportation cost, the stipend to the teens, and the instructor's salary would make up the primary budget items.

SOME TEENAGE SCENARIOS

WE'VE GOT A REAL PROBLEM HERE

Based on the Supreme Court case N. J. vs. TLO, this scenario presents the facts of the case. Fourteen-year old Valerie Campbell has been discovered smoking in the school bathroom by Ms. Clough, and brought to the principal's office. Valerie denies smoking in the bathroom and says she never smokes at all. Principal Choplick demands her purse and opens it to search for cigarettes. In the course of the search, he finds a lighter, cigarette papers, marijuana and evidence that Valerie may be dealing. He ends the scenario saying he is going to call the police, Valerie's parents, and the tag line: "We've got a real problem here." This scenario focuses on questions of search and seizure in public schools.

HE'S UNDER A LOT OF STRESS

The scene opens with Janice Percy and her 16-year-old-daughter, Kelly, at breakfast discussing the day's upcoming events. In walks Dad, Walker, who is in a ferociously bad mood, having had too much to drink the night before. After shouting at Janice and nearly reducing Kelly to tears, Dad Leaves. As Kelly looks for consolation from her mother, Mom explains away Dad's behavior by saying that he is having a hard time at work, that money is tight, and delivers the tag line.

BUT SHE PROMISED

One friend rushes to another friend, Meg to ask her if she is pregnant. Meg is really taken aback by this, and denies it over and over. The first friend says she heard two of the teachers in school talking about it. Meg looks horrified, then blurts out, "Well, I might be, but I only told one person," then goes on to say that that one person was her guidance counselor, Mrs. Parris, and that she said she wouldn't tell anyone. First friend almost laughs at the idea that a school counselor would ever keep a secret and tries to set Meg straight. "Confidentiality is a myth counselors tell you that so you'll open up to them." Meg delivers the tag line.

Copied from CLEARWAY Improv Scenarios

THEATER IN CORRECTIONS

In Maine, theater was used with prisoners through a two-year grant entitled *Maine Chance*. The theater model was one part of the overall curriculum in *Maine Chance*. The primary emphasis of the curriculum was critical thinking skills.

The theater curriculum had two objectives: (1) to teach the students presentation skills, and (2) to have them work in a team and in a community. Theater games were used with the inmates to teach presentation skills, and to increase their comfort level with the process. As most of us do, they liked the theater games. After the theater exercises, they worked in teams to practice scenarios that they had written. The teams developed a sense of community which gave students a platform for taking risks.

Participants were encouraged to always try to respect everyone's efforts and to take responsibility for themselves. Students were able to deal with anger and frustration in the scenario and in the question-and-answer period because of the process framework. Heated discussions and feelings would surface over issues they commonly face in life, i.e. parole and parole officers. The inmates created their own scenarios and then acted in them. (The oddest scenario was on UFO's.) The staff served as the audience.

Writing and word processing skills were also utilized. The students were asked to write up scenarios that related to their own personal experiences. This

gave them status as authors of a scenario. When the group began to work on their scenario, the writers were looked to for validation of its accuracy portraying the situation that they had authored.

Videotaping, helped the students to understand what was happening in a scene. There were times when the staff would make suggestions, but only after the students had reviewed the video would they understand what the staff was trying to explain to them.

All of the inmates would not choose to participate all of the time, but everyone became part of a team and if they did not want to act in a scenario they could facilitate. Videotaping was another task that students could do if they did not want to act or facilitate the scenarios.

For graduation, the staff developed a certificate listing all of the competencies that each student had successfully developed in the *Maine Chance* curriculum.

The staff hired to work with the students received two and one-half days training to explain the theater process. Also they were invited to join the Maine Literacy Theater group and were able to participate in local performances. Larinda and Bob, who worked with the group every two weeks, felt it was good to have people in from the 'outside' as well as the regular staff. This seemed to give the theater status.

Both years of the *Maine Chance* grant, the staff had to deal with the issue that the inmates felt that the process needed to be modified. They felt that it would be better if it was done differently. Inmates voiced the concern that they had enough trouble in their lives and that they didn't want to portray problems in a skit. They wanted the scenarios to be cleansed of conflict, and suggested role playing the good or ideal situations. Grant writer Larinda Meade said she thought that perhaps a developmental step had to occur before the students bought completely into the value of the literacy theater process.

Larinda Meade and Bob Crotzer agreed that the primary lesson learned while working with prisoners over the two-year period was that a very strong orientation, including modeling of the process, was essential for the program to succeed. Larinda had attempted to start the literacy theater process while working with women in a welfare-to-work group, but was not successful. She feels that the lack of success was because the theater process was not part of the whole curriculum for this group; whereas, in the prison project, it had been a frequent, integrated and essential part of the critical thinking skills curriculum.

A CORRECTIONS SCENARIO

THIS IS MY LAST LETTER

Two - three actors: Inmate, tutor, guard

SCENE: Tutor is in jail using letter writing to teach writing skills and discovers an alarming message.

TUTOR: Vi Pertle
doing a writing lesson with student, uncertain how to deal with personal info, never trained to do, 'this', sympathetic

INMATE: JAKE
deeply depressed, suicidal, wants to write to Mom, awaiting sentencing

SERGEANT: BRUNER
jolly, hearty, somewhat insensitive, brings inmate in with "watch out - Mr. Grumpy is here", makes rather rude, although well-meaning jokes

CLOSING: After Jake dictates the letter – "I'm sorry, I failed, I didn't mean to hurt you" etc. He adds, "This is my last letter."

UNDER QUESTIONING: Tutor has no training in this crisis area, doesn't know how confidential to keep her information. Jake despondent, has always failed and doesn't really care anymore.

Copied from *Maine Literacy Awareness Scenarios*

A CORRECTIONS SCENARIO

SHERIFF IS A NICE GUY BUT RUNNING A JAIL IS ANOTHER THING

FOUR ACTORS: Sheriff, Adult Education Director, Tutor, and Jail Administrator

SCENE: Jail administrators cramped office (noisy). Sheriff makes cameo appearance at end of scenario supporting program in enthusiastic broad generalities. Jail administration overwhelmed with space requirements for many groups: AA, substance abuse counseling, bible study, visiting hours. Also scheduling classes for inmates on work release seems impossible. Purpose of meeting is to set up ABE/GED class, two days a week.

TUTOR: Carolyn Stead
- Naive, enthusiastic, probably needs training in security
- Asks about bathroom and space for books
- Mentions how nice the sheriff is leading into last line

SHERIFF: Sheriff Dole
- Enthusiastic. expansive, brief

JAIL ADMINISTRATOR: Bud Armstrong
- Sweating, taxed, frustrated, too little time and space
- Complaining but not appearing weak
- Jail understaffed

ABE DIRECTOR: Rowena Carr
- Business like
- Realistic about jail population

QUESTIONING: Amount of commitment by sheriff and jail and county commissioners; security training for tutor.

Copied from *Maine Literacy Awareness Theater Scenarios*

EVALUATION

I have noticed that even people who do not feel it is necessary to hand out evaluations at the end of a performance or training are eager to read them once they are collected. Evaluations are a good way to substantiate what the audience thought of the efforts and what they felt were the most important and the least important issues. This information changes, of course, as the audience changes. These workshops create an intimate atmosphere with some of the participants, who are so memorable that one is able to tell who completed specific evaluations.

On an evaluation form, you can also ask what the workshop participants do. You will be surprised at the variety of people who are attracted to literacy theater presentations. In addition, you can request that they make suggestions about what additional issues they would like to see addressed through the process.

It is very difficult to change people's attitudes and beliefs, so you may not be able to judge whether this has happened during the theater without an extensive longitudinal study. Literacy theater may only be one step in an awareness process, but when we asked if the theater had changed their attitude, many people responded that it had made them more aware of the issue and its concerns.

In her evaluation of Literacy Theater, Kathleen J. Mackin, Ph.D., of RMC Research, writes:

> Since no training fulfills its mission if the trainees fail to incorporate new knowledge into their thinking or fail to incorporate new skills or behaviors in their work, the evaluation sought to determine what the perceived influence might be on the future behavior of training

participants. A question on the evaluation asked "What influence, if any, will what you learned in this session have on your work in adult basic education?" Categories are created from the open-ended responses and the two most frequent responses were that this experience would help participants (a) monitor their own behavior and be more sensitive to student needs and (b) be more aware of issues that impact on student behavior.

Many participants are very willing to generously respond to open-ended questions, so your theater group can probably ask most anything it wishes to solicit information from your audience. When the evaluation form is on the word processor it can easily be changed for every performance.

We used written comments from the evaluations for publicity on brochures and for grant applications. The comments gave authenticity to our narratives and demonstrated the range of responses to the theater and training, as well as the diversity of the audience that literacy theater reaches and touches both intellectually and emotionally. One example is attached as Appendix C. As suggested in Actually Performing, Chapter VI, it is a good idea for the group to meet right after a performance to process what occurred. Written evaluations give focus for the group to critique, console, celebrate, commiserate, and congratulate each other.

A SCENARIO FOR STUDENTS OF ALL AGES

IT'S SOMETHING IN THEIR BRAINS

Angie comes to Mr. Dawson after school looking for help in algebra. Mr. Dawson tries to console Angie by pointing out that a lot of women aren't good at math. He offers to find Angie a cute boy to tutor her. Angie says she thinks she can understand the material with a little help, but Mr. Dawson elaborates that math is not really important for a girl (except for recipes) and that she shouldn't worry her pretty little head about it. "Boys are better at math" Tag line. Copied from CLEARWAY Improv Scenarios

FUNDING

A variety of states have supported literacy theater through 353 Funds from the National Literacy Act and from LSCA Library Literacy Grants. Maine received a large grant from the Gannet Foundation in 1987, when that Foundation was supporting PLUS, a national effort to fund literacy across the United States.

Within New Hampshire, a budget of $2500 supported approximately twenty performances a year at which four to five actors would participate. Actors and facilitators would be compensated with a small stipend of $25 plus mileage. The amounts of administrative and secretarial costs were supported by the state office or local literacy organizations. If full time literacy workers are willing to give one to two percent of their time to the literacy theater process costs are reduced considerably. Because theater enhances awareness and increases the options for staff development, it is an excellent activity for literacy staff. It improves their work by providing variety, ongoing learning and opportunities for working collaboratively with peers.

Often capital fund drives use videos to explain their programs and building needs to the community. During a 1988 fund drive in Nashua, New Hampshire, in which the Adult Learning Center raised one million dollars for their building, the Center used literacy theater to act out scenarios for the business community rather than a video. This saved them $2000 that a video would have cost to produce.

Other funding, of course, might include the traditional means of fund raising: walks, bake sales, foundations,and fee for service. Service clubs are often looking for program presentations. A literacy theater presentation for one half hour is usually a

far better way to present the issues of literacy than a half hour speech. Once the service clubs see literacy theater they will then contribute to your literacy efforts.

AWARENESS SCENARIO
WE HAVE TO GIVE THE BABY THE MEDICINE

Four-five actors: parent, new roommate, pharmacist, two passersby

SCENE: an apartment and a pharmacy, and the streets between. Two illiterates (unbeknownst to each other) deal with a sick baby, finding the local drug store (with directions from the unhelpful and helpful passersby), get medicine and finally attempt to determine the correct dosage.

ROOMMATE: Annie Walker
just moved to this town, job hunting, friend of a friend from home
finished high school, can barely read
reluctant to go out on own on specific mission with time constraints
asks twice for directions
asks pharmacist for medicine, in a hurry to get back
upon return, instructs Sally to read directions on bottle.

MOTHER OF BABY: Sally Lane
baby Heather is sick, coughing, has cried all night
Sally dropped out of 10th grade, can read very little, doesn't want to make trip to drug store, baby is too sick to leave with new roommate
non-AFDC, employed in sister's home day care,

FIRST STREET PERSON: gives directions by words, names streets

SECOND STREET PERSON: gives directions by colors, landmarks

PHARMACIST: Harried, busy answering phone, gives directions fast, talks about cc's, and baby's weight

CLOSING: Sally "We have to give the baby the medicine".

PROPS: Phone for druggist, baby in blanket, medicine bottle

UNDER QUESTIONING: Sally moved to many different schools, thinks it is too late to learn to read. Annie didn't know she couldn't read. Pharmacist is surprised that Annie can't read. Thought that she understood directions

Copied from *Maine Literacy Awareness Scenarios*

APPENDIX A

Below are listed people from various parts of the country who have been involved in literacy theater. All are willing to receive calls to talk about their experiences and answer any questions you might have. Some have developed special uses for the theater and I have indicated that in the parenthesis beside their name.

Diane Bates
State Director
Office of Adult Education
201 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203
303-866-6611

Marianne Corley
National ALLD Center
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20009
202-884-8185

Gary Conti (Native American)
36 Hitching Post Rd
Bozeman, MT 59715
406-586-6298

Robert Crotzer (Corrections)
Bureau of Adult Learning
State House Station #23
Augusta, ME 04333
207-287-5854

Jane Cruz (Multiculture)
Woodson Adult Center
9525 Main St Rm V20
Fairfax, VA 22031
703-503-6405

Art Ellison (Teenagers)
Bureau of Adult Education
NH Department of Adult Education
101 Pleasant St
Concord, NH 03301
603-271-6698

Marcia Harrington, Coordinator
DC Adult Literacy Network
Martin Luther King Memorial Library
901 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-727-1616

Jennifer Howard
Vermont Department of Education
120 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-828-5159

Michelle Jaschke
New Mexico Coalition for Literacy
PO Box 6085
Santa Fe, NM 87502-6085
505-982-3997

Larinda Meade (Corrections)
Portland Adult Education
PRTC/196 Allen Avenue
Portland, ME 04103
207-874-8160

Patricia Mew
SABES Regional Center West
Holyoke Community College
303 Homestead Ave.
Holyoke, MA 01040
413-538-7000 X 586

Kathy Polis
Adult Education
West Virginia Department of Education
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APPENDIX B

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April 12, 1994

MEMO TO: Pat, Paula, Christie and Dottie

FROM: Art Ellison
Adult Education

RE: Theater Performance - NH Technical College
Berlin - April 18, 1994
1:00 - 2:30 PM

We will be performing for peer tutors of students in the learning center. They are all students themselves and work one-on-one with other students assigned for remedial help. Other members of the college community have also been invited.

Let's plan to meet at the college parking lot at 11:00 AM on April 18. That should give us time to rehearse and also have some lunch.

We can change some of the scenarios listed below to reflect a community college/learning center. This should be relatively easy to do as we rehearse each scenario.

"All I need is some help with my math"

Facilitator: Christie

Brian - Art
Rae Jean - Dottie
administrator - Pat
teacher - Paula

"He needs me"

Facilitator: Art

Beverly - Pat
Crystal - Dottie

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER—EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

"I don't know what to do"

Facilitator: Dottie

husband - Art
wife (student) - Christie
tutor - Pat
student - Paula

"I'm doing all I can"

Facilitator: Pat

Mike - Art
Fay - Dottie
Gloria - Christie
neighbor - Paula

"Well you're looking at one"

Facilitator: Paula

Scott - Art
Mrs. Miller - Pat
Charlene - Christie
Barbara - Dottie

"I never knew I would need this stuff"

Facilitator: Christie

Buzz - Art
Rachel - Pat
Mrs. Redfern - Dottie
Alice - Paula

AE:jc

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APPENDIX C

QUOTES FROM EVALUATIONS

"Again, as in Alexandria, I was spellbound by your group's talented acting and moved by the number of situations portrayed."

(Nebraska Library Services Coordinator)

"The message came through loud and clear. In fact, I have never witnessed such intensive interaction with speakers at any time during my six years as a Nevada Library Consultant."

(Nevada State Library Consultant)

"The group has a rare gift or talent for bringing people out... getting them to think, talk about and respond to different social situations."

(Florida State Library Program Specialist)

"The theater group was a tremendous hit, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive."

(Executive Director, South Carolina Literacy Association)

"I can't imagine anyone leaving your presentation without being touched by it. I know you all do what you do because you enjoy it, but you are truly an energetic, dedicated group of adult educators."

(Iowa State Library Program Coordinator)

"Your presence was especially important in the presentation of dramatic scenes which supported some of the very problems which libraries deal with as support for literacy in our communities. Your timely sketches were the perfect ending ... a day filled with tension and discovery."

(Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners Program Consultant)

"Thank you so much for helping to make the 1989 State Library of Arizona Literacy workshop a smashing success. Your presentations did so much more than all the facts and figures which our afternoon speakers quoted."

(Arizona State Library Program Consultant)

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"The Northern New England Group was incredibly powerful and profound. They were exciting, powerful and dynamic."

(National Literacy Volunteers of America
Conference, Volunteer Tutor)

"It was truly fascinating to watch you work together; you communicated your message in a way no book ever could."

(Connecticut Literacy Task Force Conference,
State Library Director of Field Services)

"The theater group... grappled with issues which are extremely important -- student issues. They were Fantastic/... humorous, informative, thought provoking.

(Illinois Literacy Conference, adult literacy staff)

"Your group was truly wonderful. Your work is so valuable and the creativity involved is very refreshing."

(Minneapolis Library-Literacy Training,
Project Coordinator)

"The amount of energy that was generated from both the performance and the training program was amazing."

(New Mexico Coalition for Literacy,
Executive Director)

"Words cannot express the gratitude of the people of Alabama for the Northern New England Adult Education/Social Action theater group. We had heard many good reviews of this group before their arrival and they exceeded all expectations."

(Alabama Literacy Coalition Conference)

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! The Social Action Theater set a terrific tone for our summer institute."

(Kansas State Library-Literacy Coalition)

"Ending the conference with the 'Social Action Theater' was brilliant! The audience responded very well to the emotional situation of being illiterate."

(Evaluation Report, Nebraska Humanities Council)

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